

Starting Writers Workshop Mini Lessons

Here is a copy of my beginning of the year mini lessons. Many of these ideas are the ideas that I learned at my district's Writing Institute, so I cannot take credit for all / even most of these ideas.

Day	Purpose	Activity
1	Collectin g A Writing Sample	<p>Take a writing sample to stage so you are aware of the needs of your students. I do assign a prompt for this task. It is easier for me to compare students if they are all wring on the same topic.</p> <p>Ideas for your sample:</p> <p>Squiggle line writing (I do this anyway for the beginning of the year). Read aloud the story <u>It Looked Like Spilt Milk or Not a Box.</u> Use this time to introduce the word schema and what it is. Relate how what the narrator saw in the clouds or the child saw the box as depended on their personal schema. Show students the squiggle paper. Ask students what <i>THEY</i> see. Model for students how to add to the squiggle to turn it into something else. Have students then draw their own picture from the squiggle and then write about what it is, where it is and so on. Have them tell a story about their squiggle.</p> <p>I either read <u>The Mystery of Harris Burdick</u> by Christopher Van Allsburg. It is a WONDERFUL book by an author I highly recommend. I purchased the poster set for this book. Then I have students choose one picture to write about and explain what is happening in the picture. We talk about a beginning, middle and end. I tell them that it does not matter how long the story is, just that it has a beginning, middle and end. I feel that students need to know that the work is theirs and they "own" it. I also mention that every story has as problem and a solution. However, these are the only hints I give.</p> <p>Another activity is a Dr. Seuss like prompt. We read the story <u>The Sneeches</u> by Dr Seuss. We discuss how he gives creatures made up names (like a sneech) and I tell student they get to create their own creature. They can decide how it looks, sounds and what its personality is like. The creature is called a fleezle. Then I get them to brainstorm what is going to happen in the story. Next I say I have made up a word. I don't know what it means but I do know it is something you DO called snoof. We brainstorm things the creature can do. Finally I give the prompt The Day the Fleezle Snoofed, This is a hard prompt, I am not sure if I would do this activity again. Students tend to get stuck. I DO stress that the story does not have to rhyme like Seuss' but has a few silly words in it.</p>
2	What is in your heart?	<p>Read aloud the story <u>My Map Book</u> by Sara Fanelli. Draw student's attention to the page with the heart map on it. Explain to students that today we are going to make heart maps.</p> <p>Explain to students that our heart maps will how what is close to our hearts; people, places events and memories (you may need to teach this word), objects, etc. Model for students with a large heart on chart paper. Then gives students their own heart. You can use a worksheet like the one attached or cut one out from construction paper. When students are finished you can either hang to on the wall OR have students glue it into their writer's notebooks. The most import thing is that this is ACCESSIBLE to the students. The heart map has now become a brainstorm list of what to write</p>

		<p>about!</p> <p>http://www2.scholastic.com/content/collateral_resources/pdf/h/HPLesson1_Final.pdf</p> <p>Bring students to the carpet. Model share time. Explain to students where they need to sit (mine sit in a circle around the carpet so we can see well). Papers/ notebooks are in the floor, not in hands. Hands are in your lap. Good listeners turn their bodies and look at the speaker. Only about 3-4 kids share each time. Mrs. Gregory keeps a list of how many have shared to keep it fair. Sometimes I will ask kids to share because they did a good job practicing the mini lesson, other times it is simply their turn to share. Model for students how I want them to start, "This is my heart map. The two best things on my map are..." Pick a few children to share. If time they can all then turn pair share.</p>
3	Finding a Story	<p>Some students find it very hard to know what to write about in their Writer's notebooks. To help solve this problem we brainstorm all the things you can write about and where to get ideas on "finding" a story.</p> <p>Ask students if they have ever had a hard time knowing what to write about. Ask students what we already have created that can give us story ideas. Lead students to realize that the heart map is also a brainstorm map. Then read aloud the book <u>Library Mouse</u> by Daniel Kirk. Just like Sam, we are all authors and we all have something important to say. Discuss how Sam wrote about what he knew; so we should write about what we know. Brainstorm as a whole class WHAT topics students can write about. If needed go back to the story and see if some of the pictures give ideas (writing an ABC book, a letter to someone, write all about myself, my pets, etc.)</p> <p>I laminate and post this list all year long for those who get stuck. However, most students will not use it after the first month or so. I explain to the class the purpose for the list and refer to it A LOT the first few weeks.</p>
4	Building a Community of Writers	<p>Discuss what Writers Workshop looks like and what it is. Have students help create lists of what it should look like/ sound like. Use this to establish the norms of the workshop. Keep these posted.</p> <p>Here are some examples:</p> <p>Why We have Writer's Workshop</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. From other authors we learn to write better and get information 2. Writing is thinking 3. Writing is reading 4. We can expand our writing by reading other writer's work 5. We can become better writers 6. Good titles from our work come from many ideas <p>Our Norms</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work quietly while writing so others can think

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Sound out words 3. To help spell 4. Have original ideas 5. Try your best writing skills 6. Work quietly so not to disturb others and don't forget what you are thinking 7. Always listen.
5	The Notebook/ Planting Seeds and Watching Them Grow	<p>This is a day I REALLY try to build up to. I don't just want to hand students their writer's notebooks and tell them to give it a go. I want to inspire them to write and to use the notebook. This is easier said than done. One of the things I do is share my own writer's notebook. I have created overheads of some of my own pages and have why I choose to write about these snippets. I share the artifacts I have included (I don't have many, this is an area I am working on) and the word lists I have created. I also make clear it is NOT a diary to write down what happens every day, but it is ok sometimes to do this.</p> <p>Here is a list of things Ralph Fletcher recommended when I saw him at a conference: <i>What moves you? What do you wonder/What is bothering you? What do you notice or see when you are about and about? Memories, Beautiful words, sentences and phrases (even from other authors), Fears, dreams and anxieties</i></p> <p>Artifacts like feathers, baseball cards, lists of favorite words, dialogue other people say, pictures, magazine articles, newspaper articles, comic strips, etc.</p> <p>Then I let students go and have some time to write. You will get a lot of questions "Is it ok if I write about..." Make sure they know it is their special, magical spot. If kids get stuck, refer them to the list the class created and/or their heart map.</p> <p>I gather them back together at the end and we share what we wrote about. Then I tell each student since the book is theirs I want them to decorate it in some way because it is their special book. I have never done this as an in class activity, although you certainly could. I had my students do it for homework and gave them a few nights to compete it. The only rule was that it had to come to school everyday while they were working on it since they would be using it!!! I have had kids use stickers, Yu-Gi-Oh (sp?) cards, magazine pictures, puff balls, photographs, leaves (they didn't last too long!) fabric. Whatever. They just need to make it "theirs."</p>

6	Using the Writer's Notebook	<p>First I start by having child bring their writer's notebooks to the circle and share how they chose to decorate their books and way.</p> <p>Read aloud the story <u>Ish</u> by Peter H Reynolds. Then talk about how some drawings aren't perfect. Instead they are "ish-like." Tell students we are going to use ish drawings to help us with our stories. Model a think aloud in choosing a story topic. Choose something that isn't boring and too specific (like flowers) because they can draw it really well. Instead model showing an event. For example I might use when we found my cat, Daisy.</p> <p>Model for students how to sketch in the tiny blank white space at the top of the notebook paper. The drawings don't need to be perfect- remember they are "ish-like." Spending 25 minutes on the drawing is NOT ok. Then show students how to draw from the picture they wrote on the notebook paper below.</p> <p>Remind students what to do if they get stuck. Remind them to use the resources in our room (heart maps and class brainstorm list) to help them. Then I send them off for time to write. I do not conference yet, but I do walk around and check up on kids, especially ones who are stuck and try to help them find an idea. We meet together at the end to share some of our ideas.</p>
7	What do I do when I am done?	<p>Create an anchor chart "When You Are Finished Writing." Ask students if anyone finished what they were writing yesterday. Explain to students that the best part of writers workshop is that there really is no such thing as "I'm done!" There is always so much more we can do to our writing. We can add to the picture we started the day before- but this isn't something to do for the entire writing period, but if it helps you ideas go for it. You can add more to the story you wrote earlier. You can reread stories that you wrote to help you get ideas for a new story. Or you can make a new "ish" drawing and start a new story! Add all of these to the anchor chart.</p> <p>Model for students rereading yesterday's story. Tell students that they need to always reread the story before making any decisions! It is hard to decide what you want to do if you can't remember the story from before!!! Then model out loud the decision to either add to yesterday's picture or words. Then briefly do so.</p>
8	Storing Materials in the Classroom	<p>This activity is more a management lesson. I explain to students how I want their writing folders to look. I want the writers notebook stuck in the right pocket. I want any drafts of pieces going through the writing process in the left pocket. In the brads we put in the example of writers workshop norms and I explain any handouts go here. For this mini lesson I show students where the dictionaries are, the thesauruses, the spellex's and how the writing center is organized. I share how we use paper in the classroom (for drafts and final drafts) and when you can use the materials in the writing center.</p> <p>At the end of this mini lesson I students have time to work in their writer's notebooks.</p>
9	What Conferen	<p>Explain to students that so far we have started the structure of writers workshop, but we haven't quite done ALL of it. So far we have started off each day with a mini lesson and then we had time to write and we shared. We are missing the conferences part. Explain that this is a one of one meeting with the teacher. It is only a few minutes, so we need to make the most of the time we have. It is NOT ok to interrupt the teacher when she is conferring- remember there is only</p>

	ces Look Like	<p>a short time and that student deserves all of the teacher attention.</p> <p>Explain that in a conference we will go over the students writing. Sometimes we will read the whole things, others I may only ask the student to read a part. It depends on the length of the story and how much time we have. Then I will compliment you on what looks good. But they are not off the hook yet! Then I will ask them to work on something in the story. It could be what they are stuck on and know they need help with. Or it may be something I think will make them a better writer.</p> <p>With students watch a conferring video from Jennifer Myers website and talk about what you noticed.</p> <p>http://quest.carnegiefoundation.org/~dpointer/jennifermeyers/workshopapproach.htm#</p> <p>Writing conferences are on the bottom of the page. Begin conferencing with students today.</p>
10	What to Do When the Teacher is Conferencing	<p>After yesterday I am sure that some students got stuck and needed help during conferences. It is bound to happen! This is how I teach it. You may have a different approach. Some people like an "I need help" board for student to leave post its on. I would forget and never look at it so this is out for me!! Either way, students need to know what to do when you are conferring and they need help. This is how I choose to approach it.</p> <p>Explain to students that today we are going to discuss what happens when you get stuck during writer's workshop. Thank students for being so respectful off each other and not interrupting conferences. Play this up as a big deal. It will pay off late in the year.</p> <p>Then I explain my rule. First students must ask three before me. They need to ask three classmates for help first. If they try this and no one knows, then they may raise their hand. Then they sit and wait silently. No yelling, grunting, shouting my name. I will ignore them if they do this. Between conferences I scan for kids with their hands up and try to douse any fires.</p> <p>This is a great time to explain your procedures on which student the teacher will be conferencing with. Many may have their hands up simply because they want to conference with the teacher! I have a list on the board. The students know if their name is up there, then it is their turn. If for some reason I do not get to them that day, they are first on the list the next day.</p>
11	Stages of Writing/ Anchor Papers	<p>I think it is important for students to see grade level expectations of writing. The district I used to work in had published anchor paper and descriptions of each stage. We go over each paper and talk about what makes it good or not so good and make our own kids friendly list. Show students where they SHOULD be in their writing.</p>